



# **University of Hawai'i West O'ahu**

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## **Spring 2006 Writing Assessment Examination (WAE) Project Summary Report**

**Michael Delucchi  
Director of Assessment**

**Office of Assessment and Institutional Research**

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## **Introduction**

This report summarizes results from the Spring 2006 Writing Assessment Examination (WAE) Project conducted by the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research to determine the percentage of UH-West Oahu students nearing graduation, i.e., enrolled in Capstone courses (e.g., Senior Project/Senior Practicum), that are able to pass the WAE.

## **Background**

With few exceptions, all incoming UH-West Oahu students are required to take the Writing Assessment Examination (WAE). Students are given two hours (on a computer in the campus lab) to compose an essay on one of four questions of their choosing. Examination instructions advise students to construct an outline, write a draft, revise, edit, and compose a final draft using MSWord (including the software's spelling and grammar check functions), which they print and turn in. Instructors read and evaluate the essays. Each examination is assigned an "E" (exempt/pass) or an "N" (not exempt/fail). If an essay receives an "E" from one reader and an "N" from another, then a third instructor reads the examination to determine the outcome. Students who fail the WAE are required to complete successfully Humanities 310 (Writing Skills) before receiving eligibility to enroll in Writing Intensive (WI) courses. Students passing the exam may enroll in Writing Intensive courses.

## **Study Design**

The WAE score ("N" or "E") received as an incoming student was used to represent students' "Pre-Test." In Spring 2006, students participating in the WAE Project were given the same examination administered to incoming students and these results served as their "Post-Test." Instructors who evaluated the essays were not informed that they were scoring WAE "Post-Tests," as well as WAEs for incoming students. Student identification information was absent from all WAEs. Faculty scored each examination with either an "N" (not exempt/fail) or an "E" (exempt/pass).

## **Population and Sample Characteristics**

The population for this study consisted of all UH-West Oahu (Pearl City Campus) students enrolled in capstone courses in Spring 2006. Course enrollment information revealed a population of 101 capstone students. Student assistants from the WO Learning Center visited each capstone course to encourage participation and distribute sign-up sheets. Capstone instructors were also asked in a memo from the Interim VCAA to require students to participate in the WAE Project, but most faculty made the WAE voluntary. Consequently, only twenty-seven students or 27% of the capstone population completed the WAE post-test. This participation rate was not as high as anticipated. Therefore, I screened for possible sample biases by comparing participants with those capstone students that did not take the post-test. Capstone WAE Project participants and non-participants were compared on the following characteristics: number of Writing Intensive (WI) courses completed prior to capstone (WI Courses Prior), grade point

average in WI courses prior to capstone (WI GPA Prior), GPA for all WI courses, including capstone (WI CumGPA), Capstone GPA, and UH-West Oahu cumulative GPA.

Table 1 reveals no statistically significant differences (on all characteristics) between capstone students taking the WAE (Post-Test) and those that did not take the post-test. For example, the cumulative grade point average (3.25) for WI courses for the 27 participants compared to the 74 non-participants (3.18) was not statistically different<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, Tables 2 and 3 suggest that the percentage of participants and non-participants that failed (not exempt) the WAE Pre-Test and were required to enroll in Humanities 310 – Writing Skills do not differ significantly, i.e., 48% of participants (12 students) failed the pre-test compared to 43.1% (31 students) of non-participants. In sum, analyses of the data indicate that the sample of capstone participants is representative of the capstone population for the Spring 2006 semester at UH-West Oahu.

Table 1. WAE Project Sample and Capstone Population Characteristics

Characteristic	WAE Post-Test Participant		WAE Post-Test Non-Participant		Population Capstone Overall	
	No.	Mean	No.	Mean	No.	Mean
WI Courses Prior	27	1.67	74	1.69	101	1.68
WI GPA Prior	24	3.26	70	3.21	94	3.23
WI CumGPA	27	3.25	74	3.18	101	3.20
Capstone GPA	26	3.38	72	3.22	98	3.27
WO CumGPA	27	3.10	74	3.16	101	3.14

NOTE: No statistically significant differences between capstone students taking the WAE (Post-Test) and those that did not take WAE (Post-Test).

Table 2. Percentage of Sample and Population Enrolling in Humanities 310

Enrolled in Humanities 310	WAE Post-Test Participant		WAE Post-Test Non-Participant		Overall	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
YES	14	51.9	34	45.9	48	47.5
NO	13	48.1	40	54.1	53	52.5
Total	27	100.0	74	100.0	101	100.0

NOTE: No statistically significant relationship between enrolling in HUM 310 and taking Post-Test.

Table 3. Percentage of Sample and Population Passing the WAE Pre-Test

WAE Pre-Test	WAE Post-Test Participant		WAE Post-Test Non-Participant		Overall	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Not Exempt - Fail	12	48.0	31	43.1	43	44.3
Exempt – Pass/Equivalent	13	52.0	41	56.9	54	55.7
Total	25	100.0	72	100.0	97	100.0

NOTE: No statistically significant relationship between taking the Pre-Test and taking the Post-Test.

## Results

The finding (Table 4) of the WAE Post-Test reveal that 13 (48.1%) of the 27 participants failed the exam. This result (48.1%) is nearly identical to the 48% of participants that failed the Pre-Test (See Table 3 above). In other words, individuals who failed the WAE as incoming students were very likely to fail the WAE again as they approached graduation.

Table 4. Percentage of Sample Passing Post -Test

WAE Post-Test Results	Spring 2006	
	No.	%
Not Exempt – Fail	13	48.1
Exempt – Pass	14	51.9
Total	27	100.0

I conducted additional analyses of the sample to identify characteristics that distinguished WAE Post-Test “Passers” from “Failers.” Table 5 reveals that students who completed HUM 310 were no more likely to pass the WAE than students exempt from the course. Table 6 compares “Passers” and “Failers” on six characteristics. The analyses reveal two significant differences. “Passers” received higher grades than did “Failers” in WI courses in general (WI CumGPA = 3.51) and higher grades in the capstone course (Capstone GPA = 3.85) in particular. It should be noted, however, that the grades (2.98 and 2.92, respectively) for “Failers” were nearly 3.00, i.e., a “B” average.

Table 5. Student Performance on WAE Post-Test X Humanities 310

Completed Humanities 310	WAE Post-Test NOT EXEMPT (Fail)		WAE Post-Test EXEMPT (Pass)		Overall	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
YES	7	53.8	7	50.0	14	51.9
NO	6	46.2	7	50.0	13	48.1
Total	13	100.0	14	100.0	27	100.0

NOTE: No statistically significant relationship between completing HUM 310 and passing the Post-Test.

Table 6. Comparison of Not Exempt (Fail) and Exempt (Pass) WAE Post-Test

Characteristic	WAE Post-Test NOT EXEMPT (Fail)		WAE Post-Test EXEMPT (Pass)		Capstone Overall	
	No.	Mean	No.	Mean	No.	Mean
HUM310 GPA	7	3.00	7	2.86	14	2.93
WI Courses Prior	13	1.92	14	1.43	27	1.67
WI GPA Prior	12	3.08	12	3.44	24	3.26
WI CumGPA*	13	2.98	14	3.51	27	3.25
Capstone GPA*	13	2.92	13	3.85	26	3.38
WO CumGPA	13	2.91	14	3.28	27	3.10

NOTE: \*Statistically significant difference (  $p < .05$ ) between students Passing (Exempt) the WAE (Post-Test) and those that did not Pass (Not Exempt) the WAE (Post-Test).

## Summary

The results of the WAE Project suggest little overall improvement in students' writing skills from the time of their admission to UH-West Oahu to their graduation. Moreover, the findings are consistent with prior studies of WO student writing. The failure rate (48.1%) is similar to that reported by Dr. Rebecca Lee (2005)<sup>1</sup> in a study that administered the WAE as a post-test to students at the completion of Humanities 310-Writing Skills (HUM 310). Lee found that 45% of 202 students completing HUM 310 failed the WAE. Furthermore, three years (2001, 2002, and 2003) of data from UH-West Oahu's Senior Project External Evaluation Projects<sup>2</sup> revealed that outsider reviewers rated the overall quality of students' papers substantially lower than did WO faculty, 2.46 compared to 3.52 (on a 0 to 4-point scale). In conclusion, the findings of the 2006 WAE Project, together with prior investigations and the importance of written communication skills in WO's Institutional Learning Outcomes, warrant faculty attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Rebecca. 2005. Preliminary Report on Pilot Assessment Project: UH-West Oahu Writing Post-Tests Receiving Grades of "N." Writing and Learning Center, University of Hawaii-West Oahu.

<sup>2</sup> Delucchi, Michael. 2003. Report on the 2003 UHWO Senior Project External Evaluation. Assessment Office, University of Hawaii-West Oahu.